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## PACT AND WAGER IN GOETHE'S *FAUST*

It is the purpose of this investigation<sup>1</sup> to examine in their interrelation, the three fundamental passages of Goethe's *Faust* which deal directly with the terms of the agreements entered into by the Lord, Mephistopheles, and Faust.

The passages in question<sup>2</sup> are found in the *Prologue in Heaven* (especially ll. 312-43), in the so-called Pact Scene in *Studierzimmer II* (ll. 1635-1775, and more specifically 1692-1706), and in the Death Scene in *Grosser Vorhof des Palastes* (especially ll. 11573-95). They belong therefore to portions of the drama of which it is generally assumed that they date from the important third period of Goethe's activity on *Faust*, from June, 1797, to April, 1801, to which Goethe in old age refers as "die beste Zeit," when, aided by Schiller's encouragement and counsel, he again took up in earnest the work previously done and for a while even seemed to hope to be able to complete the entire drama.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An outline of the salient points of this paper was presented orally at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association at Columbus, Ohio, in December, 1919. For the sake of remaining within the limits of the available space, the paper as here printed has been somewhat condensed.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations and references follow the text of the Weimar edition.

<sup>3</sup> Only a few days before sending my manuscript to the printer I have received *Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Goetheschen Faust* by Chr. Sarauw (Copenhagen, 1918; "Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser," I, 7.), of which I had previously seen Robert Petsch's extensive review, largely of assent, in *Germ.-Rom. Monatsschrift*, VIII (1920), 144-52. A necessarily hasty examination of Sarauw's arguments, of which I gladly admit that many are helpful and valuable, has however quite failed to convince me that practically the whole of the Pact Scene was

At that time (June 22, 1797), in an often quoted letter to Schiller, Goethe states that he is thinking over, first of all, the general "plan" or "idea" underlying the work.

Nun habe ich eben diese Idee und deren Darstellung wieder vorgenommen und bin mit mir selbst ziemlich einig.

Nevertheless he asks Schiller for suggestions on this point, and his more philosophically minded friend does not fail, in his reply of the very next day, to lay all possible emphasis on the necessity of bringing out clearly the central idea demanded by what he conceives to be the "symbolic significance" of the work as a whole.

Kurz, die Anforderungen an den "Faust" sind zugleich philosophisch und poetisch, und Sie mögen sich wenden, wie Sie wollen, so wird Ihnen die Natur des Gegenstandes eine philosophische Behandlung aufliegen, und die Einbildungskraft wird sich zum Dienst einer Vernunftidee bequemen müssen.

In a subsequent letter of June 26, Schiller reverts to this point, stating,

dass mir der "Faust" seiner Anlage nach auch eine Totalität der Materie nach zu erfordern scheint, wenn am Ende die Idee ausgeführt erscheinen soll, und für eine so hoch aufquellende Masse finde ich keinen poetischen Reif, der sie zusammenhält. Nun, Sie werden sich schon zu helfen wissen.

Goethe, in his responses of June 24 and 27, is somewhat reserved in his references to his friend's suggestions. He points to the peculiarities of his own creative procedure so different from that of Schiller. Nevertheless he says,

Wir werden wohl in der Ansicht dieses Werkes nicht variiren,

and again,

Ihre Bemerkungen zu "Faust" waren mir sehr erfreulich. Sie treffen, wie es natürlich war, mit meinen Vorsätzen und Planen recht gut zusammen, nur dass ich . . . die höchsten Forderungen mehr zu berühren als zu erfüllen denke.

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written in Rome in 1788, and that therefore the crucial passage from l. 1635 to l. 1769, which does not yet appear in the *Fragment*, is "aus einem Gusse" with what follows from l. 1770 to the beginning of the *Schülerszene*.

Vol. VIII of the *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, which is reported to contain an article by Otto Pniower on "Der Teufelspakt im *Faust*," I have not been able to secure to date (January 4, 1921).

As a matter of fact it is interesting to note that during the first year of the period of productivity which sets in with this exchange of views Goethe repeatedly makes reference, in letters and diary, to skeleton outlines and other devices ("Schema," "Übersicht") for the organization of the work as a whole<sup>1</sup> until finally, presumably some time in the latter part of 1799 or early in 1800, he draws up the much discussed "Schema," "Ideales Streben nach Einwirken und Einfühlen in die ganze Natur," etc.<sup>2</sup> During this period from 1797 to 1801 and most probably during the twelve months from April, 1800, to April, 1801, Goethe finishes the *Prologue in Heaven*, closes up the "grosse Lücke," which includes the Pact Scene between Faust and Mephistopheles, and writes at least a first draft of the closing scenes of Faust's earthly career, in which the outcome of the wager was bound to be an element of prime consideration.<sup>3</sup> Hence, in a relatively short period of time and under a creative impulse that distinctly sets out from the conscious endeavor of bringing coherence and a certain unity of purpose into what already existed and what was now being planned, the three scenes that concern us here are composed.

This is a matter of considerable importance. For if, in the face of this state of things, we were to find puzzling obscurities or even flat contradictions between the wager in heaven, the pact on earth, and the final settlement of both at the time of Faust's death, or, worse yet, within the stipulations and details of any one of the three passages taken by itself, we cannot lay such defects to conflicting plans prevailing at widely separated periods of composition and a certain cavalier indifference in regard to making the necessary adjustments. On the contrary, we are charging Goethe, and that the Goethe of *Hermann und Dorothea* and *Die natürliche Tochter*, with the inability to think straight or to express himself clearly in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. G. Gräf: *Goethe über seine Dichtungen*, II, 2, Nos. 908, 918, and 942.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gräf, *loc. cit.*, No. 949.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the final form of the third passage (ll. 11573 ff.) is apparently of very late origin will be discussed later (see below, p. 133). As the changes then made do not introduce, however, any disturbing elements, but render the poet's previous intention only clearer and the coherence with the other two passages only closer, all three can, for the purposes of this investigation, be considered synchronous to the extent indicated above. Cf. the conversation with Boisserée of August 3, 1815 (Gräf, No. 1162).

a deliberate effort to provide a central framework on which the rambling superstructure was to be assembled and completed.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the many and widely different interpretations which have been advanced, not only of the problem as a whole, but even of almost every conceivable detailed feature of it, are positively bewildering. Consolation, if any, in regard to the validity and usefulness of the vast amount of critical—and uncritical—effort expended can only be found in the fact that in the most substantial and comprehensive of recent commentaries there is a definite trend toward at least approximate agreement on the more important points and wider acceptance of the idea of essential consistency and unity.<sup>2</sup>

#### A. THE PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN

(Lines 312–43)

The principal questions which have been raised in regard to this passage are the following:

1. Does the Lord actually accept the wager which Mephistopheles offers?

2. If he does, does not his omniscience invalidate the entire situation?

<sup>1</sup> This statement applies, of course, only to the three passages here under discussion and the new plan underlying them. That there are incompatibilities between this plan and certain passages which originated under the older conception, cannot be denied, I believe. Minor disturbances are created by passages, as e.g., lines 2635–38, which clearly point to the older plan but also yield to a reasonable interpretation according to the new idea. The passages which however create the greatest difficulty are the immediate continuation of the Pact Scene, especially lines 1770–1815, and Mephistopheles' monologue preceding the scene with the Student (ll. 1851–67), both of which appeared in the *Fragment* at a time when the Pact Scene proper did not yet exist. Sarauw, according to his theory of Italian origin for the Pact Scene (see above, p. 113), is obliged to attempt a unitary interpretation of the entire text from 1635 to 1867, but while he makes observations on Mephistopheles' monologue which deserve careful consideration, he fails to clear away, or even to recognize, the apparent difficulties in lines 1770–1815, or more especially 1803–5 and 1810–15. Niejahr's careful, though to my mind hyper-analytic discussion of the Pact Scene in Vol. XX of the *Jahrbuch* is not referred to by Sarauw, either directly or indirectly.

<sup>2</sup> The sanest and on the whole most convincing opinions are those expressed by Erich Schmidt and Georg Witkowski in the introduction and notes of their respective annotated editions of *Faust* ("Jubiläums-Ausgabe" and Hesse und Becker), though neither of them treats the question connectedly or at length, and by Georg Müller in his interesting book, *Das Recht in Goethes Faust* (Berlin, 1912, 372 pages), which, despite its often discursive presentation of unrelated legal erudition, has many excellent qualities and certainly deserves a more generous reception by the regular guild of Faust critics than has been accorded it by Max Morris in *Jahresberichte* for 1912. With Minor (*Goethes Faust*, 2 vols., Stuttgart, 1901) I totally disagree in his interpretation of the wager between Faust and Mephistopheles, though his analysis of the scene in heaven is the best I know. Our American editions by Thomas and Goebel pay but little attention to the problem.

3. Which are the opposing contentions of the two contracting parties?

4. Is it Faust's eternal soul that is at stake or do lines 315-16 preclude any consequences beyond Faust's earthly life?

1. *Does the Lord actually accept the wager which Mephistopheles offers?*—There can be no doubt that Mephistopheles thinks so or pretends to think so.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it is equally apparent that the Lord says nothing which could be construed as the acceptance of a wager. He merely grants Mephistopheles freedom to play his rôle as tempter as best he can, while he declares with calm assurance that Faust cannot be led astray sufficiently to forget his better nature or higher aims. He predicts Mephistopheles' failure and final discomfiture, and is merely willing to let him try his luck. It is only by common consent that we can speak of a wager in Heaven between the Lord and Mephistopheles. As a matter of fact, the Lord with unperturbed reserve declines to descend to the plane of Mephistopheles' contentiousness.

Those critics are therefore far from the mark who accuse the Lord of violating the fundamental demands of divine love and justice by betting about the weal and woe of a human soul. In reality there is nothing of the kind. In fact, if we look more closely we find that Mephistopheles merely asks for that which is his traditional right, although a right which, as he is aware, the Lord may limit or perhaps even annul in any given case. For when the Lord says:

Des Menschen Thätigkeit kann allzuleicht erschlaffen,  
 Er liebt sich bald die unbedingte Ruh;  
 Drum geb' ich gern ihm den Gesellen zu,  
 Der reizt und wirkt und muss als Teufel schaffen [ll. 340-43],

he clearly does not refer to a new or special arrangement, but to an established practice. In the Lord's plan of salvation such a task has once for all been assigned to Mephistopheles, and if the latter (in ll. 313-14) seems to ask for specific permission, it is merely to make sure, in view of the bet he has offered, that the Lord has not perchance made different disposition in this case.

The Lord, thus, is far from submitting Faust's destiny to any unheard-of dangers, still less, of course, to a wanton game of chance;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. l. 331, even if l. 312 were taken merely as colloquial swagger.

as far from doing so as the imperturbably self-assured figure in the Book of Job. In *Faust*, the whole scene is in a less austere mood; it is richer in color and more human in tone, but neither in thought nor word does Goethe ascribe anything to the figure of the Lord that is at variance with a lofty conception or essentially reverential treatment.

2. *Does not the Lord's omniscience invalidate the entire situation?—*

It has been urged repeatedly that inasmuch as the Lord knows the ultimate outcome with absolute certainty, it is neither fair for him to accept a wager, nor is there that modicum of uncertainty without which there can be no genuine dramatic suspense.

The foregoing discussion has practically furnished the answer to the former of the two objections. Moreover, the Lord's omniscience is certainly not supposed to be unknown to Mephistopheles, nor is the Lord making any concealment of what he foresees as the future result, nor trying to take advantage of Mephistopheles' blind eagerness. Aside from the humiliation of having to acknowledge his wrong (l. 327) the latter is not threatened by any further harm or danger in case he loses his wager. His efforts will have been in vain: that is all. There surely is no reason for us to worry about his being subjected to anything like unfair treatment.

The second question, whether the Lord's prophecy of the outcome, coupled with his omniscience, does not invalidate the idea of a struggle with a doubtful issue, would surely have to be answered in the affirmative if we were dealing with a philosophical treatise addressing itself to cold reason and not with a work of poetry making its primary appeal to the imagination and the emotions. The real question therefore is whether or no the poet's art succeeds in putting the reader under the transitory spell of its power of suggestion. At any rate, Goethe has carefully avoided reminding us, in the chants of the angels or in the introductory remarks of Mephistopheles, of the Lord's omniscience; Mephistopheles, we feel, has been successful in many a previous venture; and he shows himself to be not only undismayed, but confident of victory. So despite our reason, we may well tremble at the thought of his craftiness, of the promised non-interference of the Lord, and of human frailty.

3. *Which are the opposing contentions of the contracting parties?—*

Only general expressions are used by both the Lord and Mephis-

topheles to denote what they expect Faust's conduct to be, although it is perfectly clear that what the one hopes to accomplish is the irreconcilable opposite of what the other is looking forward to. The Lord, who speaks of Faust as his servant, admits that his present service shows him still in a state of confusion, but predicts that clear vision and good fruits will appear in time, and even though like all men who "strive" Faust will continue to be subject to "error," he will not lose his moral autonomy, but like all truly "good" men, he will remain conscious of the right road even when groping in the dark. Thus Mephistopheles will not be able to draw him away from his original source in order to lead him downward along his path. This, whatever it may mean in detail, is clearly what Mephistopheles feels sure he can do. He is, however, far less explicit than the Lord and makes only one attempt to define his object, when he declares:

Staub soll er fressen, und mit Lust [l. 334].

Here "Staub" plainly implies the strongest possible contrast to "Urquell," things low, coarse, and deadening. On them Faust is to feed and he is to do it with pleasure.

What, however, is perfectly clear is that no occasional individual act is to decide, but that both the Lord and Mephistopheles are referring to the formation of character or habit, to a permanent state of soul from which conduct will flow of necessity. What the Lord has in mind is spoken of as "Streben"; it is to lead to "Klarheit," "Blüte," "Frucht," which perhaps without undue straining may be paraphrased as *das Wahre, Schöne, Gute*. To this Mephistopheles' program stands diametrically opposed.

4. *Is it the fate of Faust's soul after death that is at stake?*—Despite the fact that a natural reading of the scene as a whole clearly suggests an affirmative answer, a number of well-known critics have stoutly maintained the opposite. They base their opinion on two considerations: first, the contention that the Lord's fatherly love and sense of justice would prevent his making the eternal welfare of a human soul dependent on a wager; and, second, the ostensible restriction of Mephistopheles to Faust's life on earth, contained in the words of the Lord,

So lang er auf der Erde lebt,  
So lange sei dir's nicht verboten [ll. 315-16],



and in Mephistopheles' rejoinder that he is interested in men only as long as they are alive.

The first of these two arguments, as has been shown above (see p. 117), is based on a misconception. Let us see whether the second carries more weight.

In the two lines just quoted all commentators, as far as I know, see a *limitation* of Mephistopheles' efforts to Faust's earthly life and overlook completely that there would really be no sense to such a stipulation. Where do we learn—in Bible, legend, or popular tradition—that the power of the devil to tempt and, if possible, seduce a man does not *eo ipso* end with his life on earth? God's decision on his ultimate fate—salvation or damnation—belongs to the hereafter, but the record on which that final decision will rest is closed with the end of man's existence on earth. Even where a purgatory is thought of, which is not the case in Goethe's drama, the spirits of evil have no longer any power to lead the soul into new error after death.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that the traditional explanation of the lines in question should be abandoned. Not a limitation is expressed, but on the contrary widest possible latitude. Line 315, which is generally read with the emphasis on "Erde," has its chief stress on "So lang." Mephistopheles has asked for permission to lead Faust along his road and by the use of "sacht" ("Ihn meine Strasse sacht zu führen"; l. 314) has indicated that even he realizes it will have to be done cautiously and will require time. If limited to a short period, he implies, it would not be a fair test. Hence the Lord, assuring him that he will have the fullest opportunity to try his skill, replies:

Só láng er auf der Erde lébt,  
Só länge sei dir's nícht verbóten [ll. 315-16].

Thus interpreted the two lines not only gain a logical and forceful connection with what precedes; they also appear far more organically linked with the famous line following:

Es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt [l. 317].

<sup>1</sup> Minor is clearly conscious of the superfluity, not to say meaninglessness, of such a limitation ("Mephistopheles findet die Bedingung ganz selbstverständlich und ganz allgemein, nicht bloss für Faust, gültig") but he too cannot rid himself of the idea that a limitation is expressed. Cf. *Goethes Faust*, 2, 91-93.

For if error is inevitable as long as there is striving, then Mephistopheles may claim to have a chance of seducing his victim as long as death has not yet put him automatically beyond the danger of further temptation.

Another group of critics go, however, still farther and construe the terrestrial limitation which they see in lines 315-16 as fore-ordaining the ultimate failure of Mephistopheles' efforts and Faust's rescue from his power after death.<sup>1</sup> This is an even greater misconception, not borne out by anything expressed or implied in the text itself. For even if the lines in question were to be interpreted as stipulating a limitation, this limitation would clearly refer to the efforts of temptation only, not to the subsequent result. If it is asserted that the *Prologue in Heaven* absolutely predicts Goethe's intention of saving his hero, the claim must rest on the predictions of the Lord in lines 309 ff. and 327 ff., interpreted in the light of his omniscience and Mephistopheles' subordinate relation, not however on lines 315-16.

But what, then, has been asked by some, is the meaning of Mephistopheles' statement that his interest in men expires with death,

Da dank' ich euch; denn mit den Todten  
Hab' ich mich niemals gern befangen [ll. 318-19]?

Does this not prove that the Mephistopheles of the *Prologue*—whatever may have been Goethe's plans before or after—is merely a terrestrial teaser and tempter, a "Schalk," who does not even aim to reach out beyond man's life on earth, and that so much the more as the *Prologue* contains no direct reference to hell? As a matter of fact, the lines offer not the least difficulty to a natural interpretation. If Mephistopheles is a tempter and seducer of men on earth, he can play his rôle as such with the hope of success only as long as they are living. The dead, as we have seen, are beyond his reach. But it should hardly be necessary to point out that the case is entirely different where he has been successful or believes he is going to be. The very comparison which he makes between

<sup>1</sup> Some who do not go so far admit nevertheless, as e.g., Goebel in his edition of the First Part of *Faust* (New York, 1907, p. 262), "the implication of these lines that Mephistopheles is to have no claim on Faust in the life hereafter." As a matter of fact, not even such an implication exists.

himself in his relation to his victim and a cat playing with a mouse (cf. ll. 321–22) should be convincing enough. The cat may spurn a dead mouse, but it tries to catch a live one, not to let it run again, but to devour.

No other assumption tallies, moreover, with a natural and unforced interpretation of expressions like the following, some of which are used by Mephistopheles and others by the Lord,

- . . . . den sollt ihr noch verlieren [l. 312].  
 Zieh diesen Geist von seinem Urquell ab [l. 324].  
 . . . . führ' ihn. . . Auf deinem Wege mit herab [ll. 325–26].  
 Triumph aus voller Brust [l. 333].  
 Staub soll er fressen, und mit Lust [l. 334].

They certainly cannot refer to temporary error, for that the Lord has admitted from the start. They evidently refer to at least the hypothetic possibility of Faust becoming permanently ensnared in the meshes of Mephistopheles' net. And even if we are prepared to admit that no wager or pact *as such* will mechanically decide Faust's ultimate fate, but that the final decision will rest with the Lord, our sense of the Lord's unerring justice assures us that if such a result were to come to pass, he would admit himself defeated and declare for Mephistopheles and against Faust. If we had not this assurance there would be no meaning whatever in the poetic device of a wager, even though only a one-sided wager.

#### B. THE PACT BETWEEN FAUST AND MESPHESTOPHELES

(Lines 1635–1775)

In regard to this scene, the following problems have given rise to the most serious differences of opinion:

1. Are the pact offered by Mephistopheles and the wager offered by Faust *both* binding?
2. If not, why are both Faust and Mephistopheles willing to change from the contractual agreement to the wager?
3. Which is the real wager offered and accepted?
4. Do its terms agree with those underlying the wager in heaven?

1. *Are the pact offered by Mephistopheles and the wager offered by Faust both binding?*—To start with, Mephistopheles offers himself to Faust as a companion and eventually servant [ll. 1646 ff.], and

only when Faust desires to know the conditions of such an association, he proposes the following terms:

Ich will mich *hier* zu deinem Dienst verbinden,  
Auf deinen Wink nicht rasten und nicht ruhn;  
Wenn wir uns *drüben* wieder finden,  
So sollst du mir das Gleiche thun [ll. 1656-59].

That is, he suggests a fixed contractual agreement, based on the idea of service and wages, and practically identical with the pact in earlier Faust literature, except that instead of the usual twenty-four years Mephistopheles stipulates the length of Faust's natural life as time-limit for his services.<sup>1</sup> Aside from this point, there is nothing in the terms of this pact that corresponds with the stipulations in heaven. On the contrary, the emphasis which there has been laid on spiritual values as the decisive criteria, plainly suggests that a mechanical pact of this kind would find no recognition at the hands of the Lord. Here, for a moment, two entirely different world-views are in plain sight of each other, and any attempt at reconciliation of the two is bound to be forced. In passing, as it were, Goethe here merely pays his respects to one of the time-honored traditions of the theme, as he has done in numerous instances elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, it may be claimed, he scores a point by thus placing in strongest possible relief the new idea which underlies his own conception of the relation of Faust and Mephistopheles.

Faust, in the wild despair that has only just found torrential expression in the curse he has hurled against everything endearing life to man (ll. 1583-1606), is not averse to such a pact. His unbearable sorrows are of this life, and if in Mephistopheles' society somehow or other he can hope to drown these, he does not care what may or may not await him in a life to come.

Das Drüben kann mich wenig kümmern;  
Schlägst du erst diese Welt zu Trümmern,  
Die andre mag darnach entstehn. . . . [ll. 1660-70].

Everything now points to the immediate conclusion of the pact as proposed. Nevertheless this does not happen, and the conversation takes an unexpected turn. The passage which has just been

<sup>1</sup> Like most critics who discuss at all the meaning of "wenn" in l. 1658, I take it as temporal, not conditional. Cf., however, Lichtenberger, *Le Faust de Goethe*, 1911, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g., the signing of a document with Faust's blood.

quoted in part is clearly not construed by Mephistopheles as an acceptance, for after Faust has finished speaking, Mephistopheles is still urging him to accept:

In diesem Sinne kanst du's wagen.  
Verbinde dich; . . . [ll. 1671-72].

After these words, however, it is distinctly only the wager offered by Faust that both, with due formality, agree to. The pact is no longer mentioned. It has given way to, or better perhaps, it has been merged into a wager. I prefer to say it has been merged or transformed into a wager because the basic conditions of the pact—service on the part of Mephistopheles and Faust's soul as payment therefor—are taken over as the stakes into the wager offered by Faust.<sup>1</sup>

A further objection against the assumption, championed by Minor,<sup>2</sup> that the pact and the wager both stand, the latter as a sort of codicil to the former, lies in the fact that such an agreement would not be a wager. It would be far less of a wager than the one-sided one between the Lord and Mephistopheles. There Mephistopheles at any rate—and he alone is concerned—sees things in terms of a wager: "Both of us covet Faust's soul. If I can accomplish what I claim, I'll get it. If things turn out as you claim they will, you'll have it." But Faust's offer to Mephistopheles would simply run thus: "If you succeed in satisfying me through your gifts you can have my soul at once. If you fail—you'll get it a little later." A "wager" with anything like a balancing of advantage and disadvantage in the case of winning or losing requires the agreement to read as follows: "You offer your services, which you claim can make me forget the misery of life. I offer my soul after death. If you succeed, you win my soul; in fact you may then have it at once. Rather hell than a life as slave of your worthless and degrading pleasures. If I prevail, however, I'll remain free and you will have had your services for naught."

It is clear, then, the assumption of the validity of the pact creates difficulties and incongruities of all sorts. It contradicts the spirit and purpose of the whole *Prologue in Heaven* and connects up with absolutely nothing at the end of Faust's life. Goethe in his

<sup>1</sup> The "Dienst" mentioned in l. 1704 reverts to that of ll. 1656-57, and the "Fesseln" of l. 1701 correspond to ll. 1658-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Goethes Faust*, 2, 194-95.

later utterances on Faust's fate never so much as refers to it, but only speaks of the wager.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless we should, of course, have to admit its existence and make the best of it, if a natural reading or a searching analysis of the text required it. But when exactly the opposite is the case and violence has to be done to the text to establish the pact as binding, common sense would suggest that we trouble no further about it.

2. *Why are both Faust and Mephistopheles willing to change from the pact to the wager?*—It is with admirable skill that Goethe in thirty-two short lines (1660–91), assigning only two speeches to each of the two characters, brings about the transition from the traditional contract to the fundamentally different wager. This success is so much the more noteworthy since in such a situation a change in the terms proposed by one party is likely to be objected to as disadvantageous by the other. Nevertheless the motivation for the behavior of both Faust and Mephistopheles is surprisingly natural and logical.

Either of them is entitled to believe that he is gaining a decided advantage by the change from the pact to wager; and if it must be admitted that Faust is in too reckless a mood to care for relative advantages or disadvantages and does not act consciously from such impulses, then it is the inherent soundness of his nature which instinctively makes him shape matters in accordance with the dictates of his being.

As for Faust, it is true, his ruin, which otherwise would be postponed to the end of his life, may come very soon. But if so, it will only shorten what is to him a well-nigh unbearable existence and, moreover, it must commend itself to his sense of right and fitness. In that case he knows he deserves no better. "Wie ich beharre bin ich Knecht, Ob dein, was frag' ich, oder wessen" (ll. 1710–11). On the other hand, it is his conviction—and on that his wager rests—that such a surrender of his true nature to the temptations of a Mephistopheles will never come.

Mephistopheles, on the other hand, no less considers the change to his advantage. Confident that he can accomplish what Faust

<sup>1</sup> In a conversation with Boisserée of August 3, 1815 (Gräf, No. 1162), Goethe, in reply to Boisserée's statement that he expects the devil to be worsted in the end, makes the significant remark, "Faust macht im Anfang dem Teufel eine Bedingung, woraus Alles folgt." This "condition" can be only the wager offered in ll. 1692 ff.; and if "everything" develops from it, the pact as such is clearly ruled out.

declares he will never be able to do—just as cock-sure, as a matter of fact, as he had been in heaven in his conversation with the Lord—he believes that he will not have to bother himself in service to the end of Faust's life, but that his object will be attained much sooner. That it may not be attained at all is an alternative which his conceit prevents him from considering.

3. *Which is the real wager offered and accepted?*—This is the crucial question of the problem as a whole, and on its right understanding, more than on anything else, depends a really satisfactory answer to the ultimate question whether, at the close of the drama, Faust has fairly won or lost his wager.

An objective consideration of what is the real content of the wager which Faust offers and Mephistopheles accepts has been much interfered with by the prominence given both in the Pact Scene and in the Death Scene to those words which, when addressed to the fleeting moment, are to express delight in what it has brought and a wish that things might remain as they are. In the Pact Scene, Faust says to Mephistopheles:

Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen:  
Verweile doch! du bist so schön!  
Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,  
Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn! . . . . [ll. 1699–1706].

At the very end of his life, in a most significant situation, these fateful words again come from his lips. To most critics it has seemed perfectly clear, therefore, that, technically or legally at any rate, Faust loses his wager and that through this very use of the phrase as a sort of "Leitmotiv" the poet has wished to emphasize what he himself considered the central content of the wager.

Let us examine the facts. Whoever emphasizes the grave consequences for Faust of the mere repetition of a stated phrase, without carefully inquiring, first of all, whether the real meaning and purpose of the words is the same in both instances, whatever else he may be, is a strict constructionist. Very well, then let him not overlook the fact that, *strictly construed*, the passage in question does not belong to the wager at all. The actual wager, beyond a peradventure of doubt, is stated in the six preceding lines,

Werd' ich beruhigt je mich auf ein Faulbett legen,  
So sei es gleich um mich gethan!

Kannst du mich schmeichelnd je belügen  
 Dass ich mir selbst gefallen mag,  
 Kannst du mich mit Genuss betrügen;  
 Das sei für mich der letzte Tag! [ll. 1692-97].

For Faust's next words, "Die Wette biet' ich," refer clearly to these words and not to what follows. Mephistopheles does not wait with his acceptance for any further explanations or additions, but at once exclaims "Top!" and strikes his right hand into the outstretched right of Faust, who then with the words, "Und Schlag auf Schlag!" confirms the fact that the agreement is complete by letting his left hand fall on the two clasped hands.<sup>1</sup> The wager at this moment therefore is complete, offered and accepted in due form—and not one word has been said of "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!"—certainly an important fact, although to my knowledge nowhere definitely recognized.<sup>2</sup>

The application which I myself desire to make of the point which I have raised is not in the direction of excluding the second passage from the true content of the wager. My object is, first of all, to silence the so-called strict constructionists by a somewhat better application of their own principle. Aside from that, I am quite prepared to recognize the second passage as a weighty and significant element of the wager as a whole. Faust clearly feels it as such, offers it as such, Mephistopheles accepts it, and, in the end, we are not dealing with a case argued at the bar of law and in keeping with a technical code, but before the free consciences of thinking and feeling men, who will not be debarred from pressing to the heart of a question by undue regard for defects of formal transmission.

But this much should be clear: *If* the second passage is to be admitted as substantial evidence it cannot possibly be so admitted by itself, nor even as the point of chief importance, but only in intimate connection with the preceding passage, which, after all, enjoys the advantage of unquestioned legitimacy.

<sup>1</sup> Thus, most acceptably, though differently from the current interpretation, the act is described by Minor (*Goethes Faust*, 2, 194) and Georg Müller (*Das Recht in Goethes Faust*, 324).

<sup>2</sup> In Georg Müller (*Das Recht in Goethes Faust*, 325) I find an indirect recognition of the difficulty. He prescribes that the hands must remain clasped at least till line 1706, i.e., at least the outward symbol is to carry its binding effect over into the second passage.



As soon as this fact is established, the wager cannot possibly be interpreted, as is so often done, as though it turned on Faust's unconditional declaration that he would never say to the passing moment: "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!" and that therefore he is willing to declare himself defeated if ever, under any circumstances, prompted by no matter what emotions, he should voice a wish for things to remain as they are, for time to stand still.

I readily admit that Faust, who only a few moments before has uttered his reckless curse, feels that way, and that someone who really understood him and knew how to lead him on might easily have driven him to such an all-including wager. Mephistopheles, however, is not his man. On the contrary, if anything saves Faust from the danger of such an agreement it is Mephistopheles himself. Through his crude self-complacency he draws all of Faust's scorn and indignation upon himself and the things he has to offer. Faust, as it were, is willing to purchase unseen at a dangerously high price a parcel of goods that serve his immediate purpose although he is convinced of their intrinsic worthlessness; but when the salesman attempts to treat him as a fool by extolling virtues that do not exist, his connoisseur's pride is stung and his whole attitude toward the bargain changed. Twice Mephistopheles makes the clumsy attempt:

. . . du sollst, in diesen Tagen,  
Mit Freuden meine Künste sehn,  
Ich gebe dir was noch kein Mensch gesehn [ll. 1672-74],

and again:

Doch, guter Freund, die Zeit kommt auch heran  
Wo wir was Guts in Ruhe schmausen mögen [ll. 1690-91],

and twice Faust voices his contemptuous conviction that in this sphere there can be for him no talk of joy and contentment; first with withering scorn (Was willst du armer Teufel geben . . . ll. 1675-77), and afterwards in flaming indignation by offering the wager in place of the pact.

What he asserts in it is that *idleness* (Faulbett), *self-complacency* (Selbstgefallen), and *pleasure* (Genuss) will never be able to gain control of him so as to satisfy him. Should they do that, then he is willing to acknowledge his soul forfeited to Mephistopheles at once. The three terms clearly characterize the different aspects of

a typical case of sensual enslavement and moral degeneracy, with complete loss of all idealistic striving or "Streben," and it is only against these things, which to him sum up the promised joys of Mephistopheles, that Faust sets up his bold denial and wager. If, therefore, immediately after the handshaking has taken place, he continues: "Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen: Verweile doch! du bist so schön!" etc., two things seem clear. First, the "moment" he has in mind is not any moment whatsoever, no matter what its content might be, but a moment devoted to one or all of the Mephistophelean "good" things whose power over him he has just challenged; and second, that which prompts him to make the additional statement is a purely emotional impulse. He does not really want to say anything new, nor add anything to what he has said. It is solely a question of intensity. As he often does, he carries that which is clamoring in him for still extremer utterance to the last possible point of paradoxical hyperbole. If ever he can succumb to the allurements of Mephistopheles sufficiently to wish for the fleeting moment to delay, he will be doomed immediately. In the end it may be well that the words are spoken outside of the formal wager, for the language of defiant exaltation is rarely helpful in making contractual stipulations.<sup>1</sup>

4. *Do the terms of the wager on earth agree with those of the wager in heaven?*—I feel convinced that this is the case, and think it can best be shown by calling attention to what evidently is a logical or structural device underlying the chief formulas used both in heaven and earth. In offering his wager, Faust uses three phrases, each of which consists of two elements:

Faulbett—beruhigt  
schmeichelnd belügen—selbst gefallen  
Genuss—betrügen

<sup>1</sup> The wording of the written document which Faust signs we do not learn. This point has been strangely insisted upon by Victor Michels in *Euphorion* 13 (1906), 637 ff. in arguments which I am not able to follow. Space forbids my entering here upon a detailed discussion of this question, which is also treated at some length by Georg Müller in *Das Recht in Goethes Faust*, p. 331 f. Of course, Mephistopheles might have tried to get the better of Faust by writing into the bond (unless we assume that Faust not only signs it but himself writes it) both the pact and the wager, or for that matter other deviations from the actual agreement. But if so, the poet would have had to take us into his confidence. His very silence is plain proof that at least for substance of doctrine the written agreement must be assumed to be identical with the verbal one of which we have been witnesses.

In each instance there is expressed on the one hand an element of sensual or emotional temptation, and on the other a spiritual condition, a state of soul which is to be engendered thereby, and it is perfectly clear that Faust lays the chief emphasis on the latter.

Mephistopheles does not frame any counter-proposition. He merely accepts the wager. But he has previously attempted some formulas of his, which show an interesting parallelism with those used by Faust:

meine Künste sehn—mit Freuden  
was Guts schmausen—in Ruhe.

Hence, he too is not satisfied with Faust's willingness to accept what he has to offer, but he too aims at a result which is thereby to be achieved. And if we go a step farther and examine the one programmatic formula which in heaven he used in speaking to the Lord,

Staub soll er fressen—und mit Lust

we find that it tallies exactly with the terms he uses toward Faust and those used by Faust himself.<sup>1</sup> They all denote the same two-fold idea of indulgence in self-gratification and resultant contentment. What varies is merely the moods in which the different statements are made.

Everything is in perfect agreement, and I have no hesitation, with Erich Schmidt, to speak of "Beide identische Wetten."<sup>2</sup>

#### C. THE DEATH SCENE

(Lines 11573-95)

The following problems will be taken up seriatim, although everything hinges here on the one question: Who has won the wager?

1. Does Faust die a natural death, or is his death due to the fact that he speaks the fatal words, "Verweile doch, du bist so schön!"?

2. Does Faust win or lose his wager with Mephistopheles?

3. If he does not lose it through what transpires here at the end of his life, has he not previously lost it during the progress of the drama?

<sup>1</sup> Interesting, and perhaps not accidental, is the similarity in form and content of these formulas with that of the evangelist, "Liebe Seele, . . . habe nun Ruhe, iss, trink und habe guten Mut," in Luke 2, 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Jubiläums-Ausgabe, Vol. XIII, Einleitung, p. xxxii.

4. Is the issue on earth of such a nature that it settles automatically and unequivocally Mephistopheles' wager with the Lord?

1. *Does Faust die a natural death or not?*—This question acquires significance only on the assumption that Faust's life was to be forfeited whenever he should express a desire for time to stand still. In the last analysis, it turns therefore on the validity of the second half of the wager, independently of the first. As it has been shown that such an interpretation is untenable, we should have to decide whether, at the time of his death, when Faust speaks the words in question, he applies them to a moment of either idleness, or Mephistophelian enjoyment, or sterile self-complacency. Not even those, however, who maintain that Faust loses, set up such a preposterous claim, and it is clear therefore that Faust's death is not due to the words he has uttered.

On the contrary, Faust dies a natural death. The point can be proved not only by lines 11591–92,

Der mir so kräftig widerstand,  
Die Zeit wird Herr, der Greis hier liegt im Sand,

but perhaps even more definitely by the earlier references to Faust's approaching death, on the part of the three comrades of "Sorge" in lines 11396–97 and of Mephistopheles himself in lines 11525 ff. and especially 11557–58.

If the scene in question belonged to the world of matter-of-fact reality we should have to say it is an accident that Faust's natural death at the age of one hundred years coincides with his utterance of the fatal words. If we consider, however, the requirements of dramatic effectiveness and, still more, of an evidently typical or symbolic treatment, the adopted device appears almost inevitable. Had Faust's final admission of the possibility of true human happiness been wrung from him at an earlier period of his life, his conflict with Mephistopheles would have been at an end. The drama, as the story of this conflict, would have had to end then and there if the poet expected us to accept his hero's confession as his final view of life, as "wisdom's last word." On the other hand, the Lord had given Mephistopheles leave to try his arts of seduction on Faust to the very end of his life on earth. Had Faust been destined to lose his struggle the catastrophe might easily have come at any time

in his career; but as he was to win, i.e., not to lose,<sup>1</sup> it had to be made clear that his resistance to the blandishments of Mephistopheles would continue to the end of life, and if this life was to be in any way symbolic of the general trials and triumphs of "eines Menschen hohes Streben" we had to be permitted to witness its power of resistance even to the limits of extremest old age.

2. *Does Faust win or lose his wager with Mephistopheles?*—Generally speaking, the more recent *Faust* literature shows a growing consensus of opinion that Faust wins his wager.<sup>2</sup> Cases of arch-negation, if they still occur, are few and far between. Numerous, to be sure, is as yet that group—and it includes some important names—which distinguishes between a verdict according to the letter (Wortlaut) and one according to the spirit (Sinn), the former favorable to Mephistopheles, the latter to Faust, but it is clear that in the last analysis this group is on the side of those declaring in favor of Faust, for, on both human and poetic grounds, not the letter, but the spirit is bound to prevail in this conflict.

Critics who are willing to give an unconditional verdict in Faust's favor base it generally not so much on a correct interpretation of the wager as on the fact that in the final text, as we now read it, Faust does not actually address the words in question to the fleeting moment. He speaks only conditionally, hypothetically (Zum Augenblicke dürft' ich sagen; l. 11581). Others lay stress on the fact that the moment which Faust has in mind is not a situation that he is then enjoying (except in anticipation) but that he is thinking of the future when his lofty vision might be realized. Hence, instead of bidding the passing present to linger (which clearly is the sense of l. 1699) he merely feels he might be justified in doing so sometime in a still distant future.

Evidently Goethe has done well to revise, as it would seem, the original version of Faust's testamentary speech quite shortly before his death, prompted by the desire for a more careful elaboration "der Hauptmotive, die ich, um fertig zu werden, allzu lakonisch

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that Faust does not wager that something *will* happen, but that something will *never* happen.

<sup>2</sup> The attempt to secure the assistance of a strictly legal interpretation proved a complete failure. The two learned jurists who in the *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 24 (1903), 113-31, argued the case came to diametrically opposite findings.

behandelt hatte" (*Tgb.*, Jan. 24, 1832; Gräf, No. 1977). For if even in the face of this final redaction Goethe's critics have had such difficulties in deciding the wager, what would they have done with the earlier version which, instead of the entire sustained and noble speech of twenty-eight lines (ll. 11559-86) as we now read it, contained only a short passage of largely prosaic lines?

Dem Graben, der durch Sümpfe schleicht,  
 Und endlich doch das Meer erreicht,  
 Gewinn' ich Platz für viele Millionen,  
 Da will ich unter ihnen wohnen,  
 Auf wahrhaft eignem Grund und Boden stehn.  
 Ich darf zum Augenblicke sagen:  
 Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!  
 Es kann die Spur von meinen Erdetagen  
 Nicht in Äonen untergehn.<sup>1</sup>

Here it is clear that Faust speaks in the present tense to the present moment,<sup>2</sup> even though here, too, the present is dear to him not for its own sake, but because it reveals the possibility of a still better and broader future. And yet, as early as August 3, 1815, when Sulpiz Boisserée said to Goethe in regard to the final fate of Faust, then a matter of considerable debate, "Ich denke mir, der Teufel behalte Unrecht," Goethe with evident assent replied, "Faust macht im Anfang dem Teufel eine Bedingung, woraus Alles folgt."<sup>3</sup> This "Bedingung" is evidently not the one in line 1699 (Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen . . .), for that, taken by itself, is literally fulfilled according to the text of the older version. It might explain Faust's losing, but not his winning the wager. Goethe here refers with satisfactory definiteness to lines 1692-97 as

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Otto Harnack's edition of *Faust* in Vol. V of *Goethes Werke*, ed. Karl Heine-mann, Lpzg. and Wien, Bibliogr. Institut, n.d., pp. 21, 518, 572. This important change, strange to say, is mentioned by but few of the commentators, although many of them refer to the change from "darf" to "dürft" in l. 11581. From the variants in the Weimar edition it is almost impossible to get a clear view of the condition of the MS at this point.

<sup>2</sup> The point is really of some importance; for critics who rest their claim that Faust wins his wager chiefly on the fact that he speaks only hypothetically and not of the present lose the entire basis for their contention as soon as the earlier reading is substituted for the final one. That is, according to their interpretation Goethe had Faust lose his wager until a few weeks before his death and then suddenly decided to make him win it—an apparent absurdity.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, p. 125, footnote 1. It is in this same conversation that Goethe, while refusing to give information about the end of Faust's career, states: "Aber es ist auch schon fertig, und sehr gut und grandios gerathen, aus der besten Zeit." (Gräf, No. 1162.)

the basic condition on which the wager between Faust and Mephistopheles turns, for on this supposition only does Faust remain victorious no matter whether we adopt the older and briefer text or the nobler and more explicit lines of the revised version.

Of course, if even the earlier reading justifies the assumption of Faust's victory over Mephistopheles, the later one positively clamors for it. When, in the shadow of death, Faust uses the ominous phrase that seems to challenge the fleeting moment to delay<sup>1</sup> and speaks of what he then experiences as the enjoyment of the best and highest which life had to offer him, he is referring to things that are as far removed from Mephistopheles' "Staub" or his own "Faulbett" as they are near the heart of what the Lord laid stress upon as "Tätigkeit" and "Streben."

Mephistopheles, who clings to inapplicable words and attempts to prove his claim by them, does no more nor less than what under similar circumstances a human extortioner would also do. He tries to make the best of what he instinctively feels to be a bad case bound to go against him.

The fact that Faust has won the wager over Mephistopheles (and the latter therefore, as we shall see, has lost his wager with the Lord) must not be construed to mean that thereby, *eo ipso*, to speak in the language of the religious symbolism in which the last scenes of the drama are conceived, he can claim entrance into heaven as one of the blessed. Only divine judgment can determine this, and if—as the advent of the angels proves—it decides in Faust's favor, despite the heavy guilt that rests on him, it represents a justice tempered by mercy and love.<sup>2</sup>

3. *Has Faust not lost the wager with Mephistopheles at some earlier point in the action?*—In answer to this question, which has repeatedly

<sup>1</sup> I am not able to discuss here the question what Goethe's reason may have been for reintroducing in the Death Scene the very phraseology used by Faust in the Pact Scene (not only in ll. 11581–82, but also in ll. 11593–95). I merely wish to refer to at least two places where explanations are attempted that are not based on a wrong conception of the wager: Otto Pniower in the Pantheon edition of *Faust*, Vol. II, Berlin, n.d. (1903), p. xlii and Otto Woerner, *Fausts Ende*, Freiburg i. Br., 1902, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> From this point of view must be interpreted the often quoted letter of Goethe to K. E. Schubarth of November 3, 1820 (Gräf, No. 1219) in which Goethe says: "Mephistopheles darf seine Wette nur halb gewinnen, und wenn die halbe Schuld auf Faust ruhen bleibt, so tritt das Begnadigungsrecht des alten Herrn sogleich herein, zum heitersten Schluss des Ganzen."

been raised—and not without justification—it might of course suffice to point out that Mephistopheles does not think so. But inasmuch as Mephistopheles, especially in long stretches of the Second Part, almost completely loses the rôle of an aggressive adversary, this fact alone is not sufficiently convincing.

Here, too, everything necessarily depends upon our conception of the terms of the wager. If the mere desire for the fleeting moment to linger were to decide the wager against Faust, I think we should have to admit that he has lost it more than once, unless it be considered imperative that the very words, "Verweile doch, du bist so schön!" be spoken. These words, to be sure, Faust does not speak; but has he not felt them during moments of peaceful contemplation in "Wald und Höhle," in the enjoyment of Gretchen's love, or in even larger measure during his union with Helen?

Critics who raise these questions at all, generally answer them either by denying any wish on the part of Faust to delay the passing moment,<sup>1</sup> or by pointing to the disturbing factor of a guilty conscience and evil foreboding, or to the unreality of his dream-like experiences in the sphere of Helen. Simpler and more convincing is again an explanation that rests upon a proper interpretation of the wager. For in all such moments of happiness, the Gretchen episode included, it can be shown that Faust is far removed from that sphere of sensual and spiritual degradation which underlies the terms of his wager with Mephistopheles. Even if he actually had addressed to the fleeting moment the prayer to delay, Mephistopheles would have had no better right for claiming to have won the wager than he has in the end at the hour of Faust's death.

4. *Does the issue on earth automatically settle Mephistopheles' wager with the Lord?*—That Mephistopheles loses his wager with the Lord is quite generally admitted, even by those who doubt or deny his failure in his relation with Faust. Goethe himself, from whom we are unable to quote any absolutely unequivocal statement in regard to the outcome of the wager between Faust and Mephistopheles, expresses himself in this respect in the tersest and most definite language. Speaking to Eckermann in 1827, he declares,

<sup>1</sup> Certainly not an easy undertaking in the face of lines like 3191-92; 3217; 6493-94; 9381-82.



“dass der Teufel die Wette verliert,” and the context makes it perfectly clear that the wager to which he has reference is the one in the *Prologue in Heaven*.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, if it has been made clear (cf. above, p. 130) that the basic terms of Faust's wager with Mephistopheles are identical with those underlying Mephistopheles' wager against the Lord, then it needs no further proof that Faust's winning his wager against Mephistopheles necessarily means that Mephistopheles has lost his wager with the Lord.

The foregoing analysis of the entire problem, in the light of the different interpretations attempted and objections raised, seems to me to furnish convincing evidence that, whatever may be our judgment about the lack of regular symmetry and close-knit unity in the work as a whole or about undeniable incongruities or dislocations in certain scenes, the central axis, around which the dramatic action of Goethe's *Faust* moves, is sound and without flaw.

As Julian Schmidt has once expressed it, the three characteristic passages which at present carry the central thought of the drama were still lacking in the original versions of the *Urfaust* and the *Fragment*. They are not the trunk from which all this motley variety of scenes has sprouted, but rather the support that has been placed under it afterwards. But I feel inclined to continue: it is a support carefully planned and strongly put together, quite capable of holding up the great mass of the luxuriant growth resting upon it, even though here and there single unruly shoots may be trailing to the ground or threatening to fly off with the breeze—not to the disadvantage of the living beauty of the whole, even though to the annoyance of some of the sternest among the high priests of unruffled regularity and order.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gräf, No. 1481.